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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TEL AVIV 002672

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/30/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND DAS DANIN DISCUSS REGIONAL AND
BILATERAL ISSUES WITH MFA DG ABRAMOVITCH

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b)(d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. The Ambassador and visiting NEA DAS Robert Danin met with MFA DG Aharon Abramovitch in Jerusalem August 28 to discuss ongoing regional and bilateral issues. Abramovitch reported significant progress in the negotiations over stationing Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) ambulances in East Jerusalem, and was optimistic that a deal could be concluded the following day (Note: Embassy understands that it was). On UNSCR 1701, DAS Danin and Abramovitch agreed that while it had been a general success, the time had come to push for a more robust monitoring effort along the Syria-Lebanon border. DAS Danin asked for the GOI's current thinking on the Sheba Farms, noting that the October 1701 report was likely to contain some difficult language following the UN cartographer's visit this month. Abramovitch responded firmly that the issue was too sensitive for Israel to deal with at this time, and stressed the GOI's hope that the October 1701 report would not contain any calls for Israeli action on Sheba, either through linkage to Siniora's 7-point plan or advocacy of a UN role in administering the area. DAS Danin asked whether the GOI was any closer to being able to provide targeting data to help the UN teams in southern Lebanon locate remaining unexploded cluster munitions from last summer's war with Hizballah, noting that earlier Israeli pledges were now overdue. Abramovitch said he would look into the issue and suggested the U.S. also inquire at the MoD. Abramovitch said that he and FM Livni had had a good meeting with Salaam Fayyad the previous day, during which the sides had agreed to revive some of the Oslo-era working groups to deal with ongoing bilateral issues. Abramovitch also noted that the Palestinians and GOI agreed on the need for the upcoming Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLIC) meeting to stay focused on economic and development needs and to avoid political issues. Abramovitch urged the U.S. to increase the pressure on Egypt to stop the smuggling into Gaza. The GOI was convinced the problem was one of Egyptian will, not capacity, he said, discounting Egyptian arguments that it needed more border troops. The Ambassador and DAS Danin responded that the GOI should still consider allowing more Egyptian troops on the border, even if the goal was only to "call their bluff." The Ambassador also demarched Abramovitch on U.S. concerns over ongoing settlement and outpost expansion in the West Bank, and DAS Danin raised the issue of Amcit mistreatment at Ben Gurion airport, noting that the latter remained a serious irritant in bilateral relations. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Abramovitch was joined by MFA DDG For International Organizations Ronny Yaar, MFA Senior Advisor Alon Ushpiz, North America Desk Director Dan Arbell and MFA Advisor Oded Joseph. Poloff (notetaker) joined the Ambassador and DAS Danin.

PRCS Ambulances

13. (C) Abramovitch opened the meeting by commenting that the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators would be meeting the following day (August 29) to review progress on the issue of stationing PRCS ambulances in East Jerusalem. He reported that following the personal involvement of Olmert, Livni and Fayyad, the GOI was cautiously optimistic that an agreement had been reached, which he hoped could be finalized at the next day's meeting. (Note: GOI lead negotiator MFA DDG Ronny Yaar called the Ambassador August 29 to inform him that the two sides had reached agreement.)

UNSCR 1701 and Border Monitoring

14. (C) Abramovitch thanked the U.S. for its work to ensure that the June UNSCR 1701 report was as balanced as possible. "It was not ideal," he said, "but was still good." He stressed that it would be important to reinforce the June report's positive elements by strengthening LAF involvement with UNIFIL and by working to improve the situation on the Lebanon-Syria border. On this last point, Abramovitch wondered whether anything could be done to strengthen the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team (LIBAT) mission.

15. (C) DAS Danin noted that since the extent of weapons smuggling over the Syria-Lebanon border was no longer being seriously debated in capitals, we were turning our attention to enhancing the capabilities of border monitors. We hoped to convene a Contact Group meeting on the margins of next month's UNGA, where we could discuss expanding the trial German program and increasing the monitoring activities as called for in the June LIBAT report. Overall, he said, the

TEL AVIV 00002672 002 OF 004

U.S. viewed 1701 as a relative -- if incomplete -- success.

Sheba Farms: Israelis Standing Firm

16. (C) DAS Danin inquired about the GOI's thinking on Sheba Farms, noting that the U.S. wanted to work with Israel to minimize what was likely to be difficult language on Sheba in the October 1701 report. Abramovitch responded that he hoped the 1701 report would not complicate the already sensitive issue of Sheba Farms. The GOI could accept neither Siniora's 7-point plan nor the transfer of all or part of Sheba Farms to the UN, he said, and any reference to such ideas in the 1701 report would put Israel in a difficult situation.

17. (C) DAS Danin asked whether there was some middle ground the Israelis could accept -- somewhere between Siniora's plan and doing nothing. Abramovitch responded firmly that he did not see any way for the GOI to deal with the Sheba issue at this point. "It would be crazy," he said, "because it would legitimate Hizballah and open a Pandora's Box, and would be the start of chaos along the border between us and Lebanon." Asked whether the GOI could accept some vague language linking Sheba discussions to full implementation of 1701, Abramovitch side-stepped the question by noting that 1701 did not even mention Sheba Farms.

18. (C) The Ambassador asked if there were any steps Israel could take to reduce Hizballah's ability to use the Sheba Farms issue to its advantage. MFA Advisor Alon Ushpiz said the GOI had already made a significant gesture by allowing the UN's cartographer to examine the area. DAS Danin replied that in doing so, the GOI had bought itself six months, but that it appeared as though the Israeli strategy for dealing with the next 1701 report was to wait and just hope that everything turned out alright. He stressed that the U.S. needed a little flexibility on the Israeli side in order not to surrender the process to those who wanted to expand the scope of 1701 to focus attention on the Sheba issue. We need

to keep the process focused where it should be -- on Hizballah and the Syria-Lebanon border. Abramovitch reiterated how sensitive the Sheba issue was for Israel, "especially for Olmert and Livni, because of last summer's war; and for Barak, because of the Lebanon withdrawal." Abramovitch said again that he hoped the October 1701 report would not cause problems.

Cluster Munitions

¶9. (C) DAS Danin asked whether the GOI was any closer to being able to provide targeting data to help the UN teams in southern Lebanon locate remaining unexploded cluster munitions from last summer's war with Hizballah. He noted that we were told two months ago by the GOI that it would be able to provide an answer to the request for data in about two more weeks, yet at this point we had still not received any response. Abramovitch and Yaar said they would look into the issue, and suggested the U.S. also inquire at the MoD.

Middle East Peace and AHLC

¶10. (C) Abramovitch said that he and FM Livni had a good meeting with Salaam Fayyad and Sa'eb Erekat the previous day. In response to a question from the Ambassador about press reports saying the two sides had agreed to establish joint working groups, Abramovitch said they had agreed during their meeting the day before to revive "the five Oslo working groups." Without going into detail, he said the working groups would deal with "ongoing bilateral relations," such as "economics and incitement."

¶11. (C) Turning to the issue of the upcoming Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) meeting, DAS Danin said it would be important to ensure that meeting participants stick to economic and development needs, and avoid the temptation to dabble in politics. Abramovitch agreed, and said that both he and Erekat had told the Norwegian hosts that they wanted the AHLC to only deal with economic support.

Gaza Smuggling

¶12. (C) On Gaza, Abramovitch stressed that the issue of smuggling had to be dealt with in order succeed in our efforts to marginalize Hamas. "Something must be done," he

TEL AVIV 00002672 003.2 OF 004

said, "and Fayyad agrees." He asked whether there was anything the U.S. could do to increase the pressure on Egypt to crack down harder on smuggling. The GOI did not accept the argument that Egypt needed more troops on the border, he said, and instead believed it was a problem of will rather than capacity. "If they (the Egyptians) were serious, they would be cracking down in the Sinai, in Cairo, et cetera," he argued; instead, the Egyptians claim they need more forces on the Gaza border while doing nothing in areas where they have no restrictions. Israeli experts were unanimous in their assessment that 750 troops were enough to control the Gaza border and halt the smuggling, Abramovitch said. The Ambassador asked, even if that was the case, why not "call their bluff" by accepting the Egyptian proposal to allow 1500 Egyptian troops on the Gaza border instead of the current ¶750. He noted that the U.S. was not convinced that 750 troops actually were sufficient. Perhaps additional troops would help to stiffen Egypt's resolve to deal with the smuggling problem. The Ambassador pointed out that with only 750 troops divided into three shifts to cover the border 24 hours a day, the Egyptians could only have 250 troops actually working at any given time. Ushpiz responded that "no one in Israel will agree to that; we have consensus that

it is only a problem of will."

¶13. (C) NOTE: In DAS Danin's follow-up meeting with DDG Yaar and DDG for the Middle East Yacov Hadas-Handelsman (SEPTTEL), Hadas-Handelsman suggested that our understanding of the number of Egyptian troops available for border duty was incorrect. While the Egyptians were only allowed 750 troops on the border at any given time, there was no need to divide them into three shifts of 250 each. Instead, the Egyptians could have "thousands" of troops stationed just outside Zone C and rotate the full allowance of 750 up to the border for each working shift.

Settlement Outposts and Amcit Mistreatment at Border Crossings

¶14. (C) The Ambassador told Abramovitch that the U.S. remained deeply concerned about the ongoing growth of settlements and illegal outposts in the West Bank. He noted that in at least one case, we have noticed the IDF supplying electricity from a military unit to a nearby illegal outpost. We were also convinced that -- contrary to GOI claims -- the new construction in Nof HaSharon was not part of the existing settlement of Alfe Menashe, but was in fact an entirely new settlement. The Ambassador noted that Nof HaSharon is actually three kilometers from Alfe Menashe, and that the security barrier had to be crossed twice in order to travel between them. Moreover, Nof HaSharon was drawing municipal services from a neighboring town inside the Green Line, not from Alfe Menashe. It was unreasonable to argue that Nof HaSharon is just a new neighborhood of Alfe Menashe. Passing Abramovitch an Embassy-prepared white paper on settlements and illegal outposts, the Ambassador stressed that we still expected the GOI to honor its commitment to the U.S. to dismantle outposts and to halt settlement expansion. Abramovitch thanked the Ambassador for the paper and said he would look into the issue and discuss our demarche with others.

¶15. (C) DAS Danin also raised the issue of Amcit mistreatment at Ben Gurion airport, noting that we continue to receive regular reports from Amcit travelers -- mostly but not exclusively of Arab origin -- who were either denied entry into Israel and/or who complained of harassment by security officials as they were entering or exiting the country. The Ambassador highlighted several recent cases, including that of Georgetown University's Imam Hendi, who traveled to Israel in August on a PD-sponsored trip to discuss interfaith peace efforts with local religious leaders, but who was only allowed into the country after significant high-level interventions by the Embassy. The Ambassador and DAS Danin stressed that we would continue to insist that our citizens be treated fairly at ports of entry, and that they not be discriminated against on the basis of national origin. Abramovitch responded that he thought the situation had gotten better in recent months, but acknowledged that individual cases might still exist. He was pleased to hear that Imam Hendi was able to leave Israel without incident. (Note: Imam Hendi, who is of Palestinian origin, left via the Allenby Bridge to Jordan, rather than via Ben Gurion as originally planned, because GOI policy prohibits Palestinians from using Ben Gurion for international travel.)

(U) DAS Danin has cleared this message.

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TEL AVIV 00002672 004.2 OF 004

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